

# **NORTH AMERICAN LEADERS PREPARE FOR AVIAN FLU PANDEMIC**

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**WASHINGTON, AUGUST 27** --- As the human toll from avian influenza rises to 321 cases, with 194 deaths worldwide, leaders of the United States, Canada and Mexico have released a plan that outlines how the three countries will work together if the highly pathogenic virus makes its way to North America.

In a joint statement released during the August 20-21 North American Leaders' Summit in Montebello, Quebec, Canada, President Bush, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Mexican President Felipe Calderón announced the completion of the North American Plan for Avian and Pandemic Influenza.

"Neighbors help each other in times of distress," they said in a statement. "Our governments have worked together to address how we might better prevent, prepare for, and respond to disasters -- either natural or man-made -- by developing a common approach to all aspects of emergency management."

The plan is part of the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) of North America, a trilateral effort launched in March 2005 to increase security and enhance prosperity in Canada, Mexico and the United States through greater cooperation and information sharing.

At the March 2006 SPP summit in Cancun, Mexico, the nations' leaders committed to developing a comprehensive, coordinated and science-based North American approach to prepare for and manage avian and pandemic flu.

"The North American plan is an example of how we can work together to more efficiently and effectively protect our three countries against the threat of pandemic influenza," Paula Dobriansky, under secretary of state for democracy and global affairs, told USINFO August 21. "It would be much harder, if not impossible, to be similarly effective on our own."

## **TRANSCENDING NATIONAL BORDERS**

The 44-page document complements national emergency management plans and builds on core principles of the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza, the standards and guidelines of the World Organization for Animal Health and the World Health Organization, including the revised International Health Regulations (IHRs).

The IHRs are legally binding rules adopted by most countries to contain disease threats that could spread rapidly from country to country.

Such diseases include emerging infections like a new human flu virus or severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), which caused a major epidemic between November 2002 and July 2003, with more than 8,000 known cases and 774 deaths.

Threats also could come from chemical spills, leaks and dumping or nuclear accidents.

The newest IHR revision, completed in 2005, updated the 1969 IHR, which addressed only four diseases -- cholera, plague, yellow fever and smallpox, a disease that has been eradicated.

The North American plan offers a framework for accomplishing the following goals:

- ♦ Detecting, containing and controlling an avian flu outbreak and preventing transmission to people.
- ♦ Preventing or slowing the entry of a novel strain of human flu to North America.
- ♦ Minimizing illness and death.
- ♦ Sustaining infrastructure and mitigating the impact to the economy and to society.

#### COORDINATED APPROACH

The plan describes the organizational emergency management frameworks in each country and how the countries will coordinate activities. It addresses animal and public health issues, including notification, surveillance, epidemiology, laboratory practices, vaccines and anti-virals, personnel, stockpiles of vaccines and drugs, and public health measures.

It also addresses border and transportation issues, including containment measures for air travel, maritime travel and land border crossings.

A series of layered, collaborative measures among the three countries could slow the spread of a new flu strain, providing valuable time to mobilize resources, coordinate responses and mitigate illness and death.

The plan extends beyond the health sector to include a coordinated approach to protecting critical infrastructure, including recognizing the importance of business continuity planning and interdependencies among sectors.

The full text ( <http://www.state.gov/g/avianflu/91242.htm> ) of the plan is available on the State Department Web site.

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